

# Critical thinking about the uses of research

**Tim Hope**  
**Reece Walters**

**Edited by:**

Will McMahon

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Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

King's College London

Strand

London WC2R 2LS

Tel: 020 7848 1688

Fax: 020 7848 1689

[www.crimeandjustice.org.uk](http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk)

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## Introduction

One of the promises of New Labour was that government policy would be grounded in 'evidence based research'. In a speech to the Economic and Social Research Council in early 2000, David Blunkett, the then education secretary, argued that 'It should be self-evident that decisions on government policy ought to be informed by sound evidence. Social science research ought to be contributing a major part of that evidence base. It should be playing a key role in helping us to decide our overall strategies.'

Mr Blunkett went on: 'If you have the arrogance to believe you already know all the answers, sound independent research which seems to question your assumptions is an inconvenience to be dealt with and minimised rather than an opportunity to learn, reflect and improve<sup>1</sup>.' The politics of the 'third way' seemed to offer a fresh start to the use of the government's research capacity.

In early 2005 a seminar was organised by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies that held a critical review of the promise of evidence based policy making. The seminar was prompted by a series of informal discussions staff at the Centre had with a number of academics at criminological conferences in the previous year. The essential content of the discussions was

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<sup>1</sup>Blunkett, D. (2000) Influence or Irrelevance: can social science improve Government? Speech to the ESRC 2 February 2000.

that the government had not lived up to the promise of Mr Blunkett's ESRC speech and that the publication of Government research was being steered by political requirements rather than straightforward policy development founded on an evidence base.

In February 2006 Criminal Justice Matters (CJM), the quarterly publication of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, published a series of short articles under the general title of 'Uses of Research' that took forward the debate about the government's use of the criminological research from a wide range of perspectives. Given the high priority the government had placed on evidence based policy, the media understandably took a strong interest in this issue of CJM. One of the most trenchant critics of government research practices, Reece Walters, now Professor of Criminology at the Open University, was invited onto Radio Four's prime time morning news programme, Today, to be interviewed about his research into political pressures on criminological research.

In the summer of 2006 the debate was taken up again at the British Society of Criminology annual conference. On this occasion Professor Tim Hope of Keele University debated with Home Office officials about the management and publication of Home Office commissioned research. Professor Hope was also invited to give evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee <sup>2</sup> on the issues he had raised in relation to the Government's handling of Home Office output.

As a result of these events the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies decided to launch a monograph series under the general title of '*Evidence based policy*'. This is an issue that deserves, in the public interest, to be examined on a regular basis. Thus the aim of the series is to allow further discussion and exploration, by

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<sup>2</sup> Science and Technology Committee Publications Session 2005-06 Minutes of Evidence Wednesday 24 May 2006 Question Numbers 987-999

academics and policy makers engaged in the production and use of criminological research, of the issues raised.

Given that the original impetus for this series was initiated by Professors Walters and Hope, we thought it fitting to ask them to begin with essays that both restate and update the arguments that they originally presented.

**Will McMahon**

Policy Director

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

## About the authors

### **Reece Walters**

Reece Walters is Professor in Criminology at the Open University. He has published widely on the ways that criminological knowledge is constructed including his book *Deviant Knowledge, Criminology, Policy and Practice*. With over 70 authored works on issues such as youth justice, state and corporate crime and more recently on environmental crime, Professor Walters is an internationally reputed scholar. In 2007 he was awarded the Radzinowicz Prize in Criminology.

### **Tim Hope**

Tim Hope has been Professor of Criminology at Keele University since 1997. He is also Senior Visiting Research Fellow, Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, School of Law, University of Edinburgh. He co-leads Work-package 6 (Public Policies and Crime) of the CRIMPREV Co-ordination Action of the EU Sixth Framework Programme.



# Government manipulation of criminological knowledge and policies of deceit

Reece Walters<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Times Higher Education supplement recently reported how members of the British Sociological Association have called upon all academics in Britain to 'play a more prominent public role' and to 'push intellectual credentials' by stimulating critical debate of government policies and practices (Attwood, 2007: 1). Never before has such public debate about crime and criminal justice been required more than at present. Academics should be publicly debating government claims that, for example, crime is down owing to 'tough laws ... bearing fruit' and 'targeting the offender rather than the offence will be the hallmarks of our criminal justice system' (Blair, 2007a, b). Such claims are clearly debatable. With record numbers of prison inmates in the UK, such statements of 'success' could draw the most conservative academic criminologists into contestation. Yet it is the silence and denial of the Prime

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<sup>1</sup> Professor of Criminology, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA;  
r.walters@open.ac.uk

Minister and his Home Office officials on issues such as the 'war on terror', the treatment of dislocated peoples fleeing persecution, the over-policing of ethnic minorities, the demise of civil liberties and the erosion of the rule of law, the massive increase in fraud and corporate tax evasion, the unacceptable level of health and safety violations and the various political 'scandals' that have become part and parcel of contemporary British life that necessitate immediate and urgent academic and government debate.

This is a government that does not encourage public dialogue or entertain critical appraisal; indeed, it actively subverts and whitewashes it. The New Labour government has demonstrated a resistance to transparency and open debate. An Attorney General who failed to make public his entire legal opinion on the case for war; a Chancellor who actively suppressed treasury documents about the pensions scandal; prime ministerial advisers arrested for suspicion of conspiracy and perverting the course of justice over cash for peerages and Lord Goldsmith seeking injunctions to prevent the BBC broadcasting police revelations; a Prime Minister who privately instructed the Serious Fraud Office to drop its investigations against weapons giant BAE and then conducted secret deals behind closed doors; a cabinet accused of withholding information needed for an open debate about the renewal of Britain's nuclear fleet; government legislation that has changed the nature and parameters of 'public' inquiries; a constitutional affairs minister who tacitly supported a private member's bill that attempted to prevent Freedom of Information (FOI) disclosure of parliamentary expenditure; Mr. Blair's direct communication with former BBC directors to moderate Iraq war coverage; an immigration minister forced to resign over the sex-for-asylum scandal and no government inquiry; Number 10 silence over Mrs. Blair's involvement in the deportation case of former fraudster Peter Foster. The list could go on. This is not a government that openly conveys and debates the truth. It is a government that conceals, manipulates and suppresses truth. This is not maladministration but a form of corruption, whereby the reliable, honest and available flow of accurate information to the public is deliberately disrupted or withheld. A public that does not have access to the truth cannot participate in debate and

is thereby denied its democratic right. Such are the misguided values and practices of New Labour governance that have, unsurprisingly, influenced and become embedded in the executive of government. The results of the 3 May 2006 elections across Britain bear testament to public discontent about New Labour's political performance.

This article explores this existing political culture of governing by half-truths and explores the ways in which the Home Office and the Scottish Executive skew, manipulate and distort criminological research for political gain.

## Home Office

During 2006-2007 the Home Office allocated 68 per cent (£46.6 million) of its research budget to crime and criminal justice (Wheeler, 2006). During the same period, the Home Secretary, John Reid, directed a 'pause' intended 'to improve the quality of Home Office research'. National headlines claimed that the pause was nothing more than an attempt to 'bury bad news', arguing that gun crime research conducted by Chris Lewis at Portsmouth University was poised to reveal the ease with which criminals could access firearms in Britain (Harper and Leapman, 2006). The Home Secretary's pause was a poisoned chalice for the Home Office. If the pause was a manoeuvre to block research damning the government, then it was an overt act of suppression and cover-up. If it was an action taken to improve the internal functioning of the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) then it was a declaration of inefficiency, or indeed, incompetence. An official statement from the Home Office explained:

*'The Home Secretary asked for a short pause in publications whilst he considered how HO publications should be dealt with in future and so as the new Home Secretary he could take a look at what is on the stocks and in the pipeline.'*

This identifies a clear ministerial dissatisfaction with the criminological research undertaken by the RDS – or a Home Secretary wanting to 'vet' the stockpile of research to ensure that

nothing too damning or damaging was on the horizon. Whatever the reason, the pause was not intended to promote critical scholarship of the criminal justice workings of government.

Throughout the pause (which included a cessation on the release of all taxpayer-funded research publications) quality was to be achieved by:

- '(i) Strengthening the quality assurance processes for research, including the use of external peer review as well as external review of our internal processes for commissioning new work.*
- (ii) Developing a new format for research publications that are shorter, more succinct and aimed specifically at supporting the development and delivery of Home Office policy.'*

**FOI 6262**

For those of us in academic criminology who have for years declared the biased, controlling and manipulative practices of Home Office criminological research (Tombs and Whyte, 2003; Hope, 2006, Hillyard et al., 2004; Walters, 2003), this was nothing more than home secretarial endorsement for what we have known for years – that RDS is 'not fit for purpose'. Home Office suppression of criminological research that contradicts ministerial policy and opinion is a feature of this arm of government, with a long history that has intermittently received national headlines (Travis, 1994).

The Home Secretary publicly announcing the shortcomings of his own department, calling a halt to all research activities and then radically splitting a centuries-old government institution into two to improve efficiency and restore public confidence was a declaration of existing failure. The scale and degree of the ineptitude and uncertainty will remain an eternal mystery to those of us on the outside, yet the internal machinations must surely have reached a desperate state for the Home Secretary to make such a damning and embarrassing public decision, his own department failing and in need of radical overhaul. Of course, there were various attempts to minimise John Reid's announcement from within, and none more striking than that of

Chloe Chitty's at the British Society of Criminology's conference in Glasgow. Chloe Chitty, a senior researcher within the RDS, attempted to downplay the minister's decision to a 200-plus audience and to reaffirm the 'importance' of evidence-led policy created by a constructive alliance between government and the academy. The rhetoric of 'changing times', 'new challenges' and 'global threats' was welcomed like a stinging nettle and widely rejected by many criminologists at the conference, including a small delegation who walked out during Ms. Chitty's talk. The Home Office rhetoric of 'working with academics' and 'building alliances' must be seriously questioned. In June 2007, at The Open University's International Centre for Comparative Criminological Research's conference, Ms. Chitty presented her views on 'the most pressing issue facing the prison service...'. In it she stated that 'they [the Home Office] were seeing' that inmates with sentences beyond six months were re-offending with less frequency than those serving shorter periods of incarceration. This led Ms. Chitty to conclude that perhaps we should be looking at longer prison sentences. Professor Pete King (historian at The Open University) pointed out what any good undergraduate criminology student knows, that there is a mountain of criminological data that identifies the fallacy in Ms. Chitty's thinking. Ms. Chitty responded: 'That's very interesting, and that's why we need to be listening to academics and the work you are doing'. She then left the conference and didn't return. Not only was the ignorance profound and concerning but this farcical rhetoric of 'partnership', 'listening', 'alliance', solving problems 'together' is laughable when we all know that the Home Office cherry-picks research findings for political ends. Hence, 'we want to listen to what you've got to say, as long as it conforms to our view, and is exactly what the minister wants to hear'. That is not partnership but government deceit, and it is precisely why the Home Office has been criticised and subject to severe external scrutiny.

Much of the media attention on the Home Office shake-up focused on escaped prisoners, immigration and terrorism. Yet a sceptic might say that the Home Office's reconfiguration may have been a government ploy to avert the disquiet and anxieties posed by

opposition parties and the House of Commons select committees. Take, for example, the Science and Technology Committee, which raised serious concerns about the research undertaken and commissioned by the RDS. It concluded:

*'Research must, so far as is achievable, be independent and must be seen to be so. We are not convinced that the current mechanisms for commissioning research deliver this objective ... We urge the Government CSA to investigate proactively any allegations of malpractice in commissioning, publication and use of research by departments and to ensure that opportunities to learn lessons are fully taken advantage of. We would expect the results of any such investigations to be made public.'*

**House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2006: 97-98**

Finally, the parliamentary record identifies and confirms what criminologists up and down the length of Britain have been saying and experiencing for some time, that conducting research commissioned by the Home Office is a frustrating, one-sided arm-wrestle, where the Home Office ensures that it will almost always cherry-pick the answer it wants. Elsewhere I have identified how Home Office criminology is politically driven; how it provides policy-salient information for politically relevant crime and criminal justice issues; and how its research agenda is motivated by outcomes that are of immediate benefit to existing political demands. It is the quintessential 'embedded criminology' (Walters, 2007). Critical scholarship is viewed as unwelcome, unhelpful and is actively discouraged. Any credible independent research that is likely to shed a negative or critical light on the policies and practices of government will not be procured, funded, published or even debated by the Home Office. This is clearly problematic. It is widely acknowledged that the Home Office RDS plays an important part in the funding of criminological scholarship in the UK. As Rod Morgan has accurately identified (2000: 70-71), the RDS is the 'largest single employer of criminological researchers in the UK', where almost all its research is 'atheoretical fact gathering', 'narrowly focused', 'short-termist', 'uncritical' and 'designed to be policy-friendly'. The Home Office has become a site of criminological hegemony in the UK within a New Labour politics of 'evidence-based research'. As

such, its locus of power within the funding and dissemination of criminological scholarship has recently been met with opposition from scholars who argue for criminology to be aligned with much needed 'counter hegemonic movements' that can actively debate and resist the tilted picture of crime created by the Home Office (see Tombs and Whyte, 2003; Hillyard et al., 2004).

Home Office criminology has a very clear purpose: to service the 'needs' of ministers and members of parliament. While revealing, it is not surprising that Hillyard et al. (2004:4) identify that the RDS has experienced a 500 per cent increase in funding for external research in recent years, largely due to New Labour's desire for 'evidence-led policy'. Moreover, they identify from an analysis of RDS research outputs during the period 1988 to 2003, from a catalogue of 571 reports, that 'not one single report deals with crimes which have been committed as part of legitimate business activities', concluding that RDS research serves to reinforce state-defined notions of criminality while paying lip service to state and corporate crime. It is clear that the Home Office is only interested in rubber-stamping the political priorities of the government of the day. If it were concerned with understanding and explaining the most violent aspect of contemporary British society (notably the modern corporation) it would fund projects that analyse corporate negligence, commercial disasters and workplace injuries – but it doesn't. If it were concerned with issues of due process and justice it would examine deaths of inmates in British custody (including children), the ill-treatment of mentally ill offenders, the imprisonment of women for minor offences and the unacceptable levels of miscarriages of justice – but it won't. If it were concerned with violence and human rights abuses it would fund projects to examine the corporate/state role in Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland or policies on asylum or the sale of weapons to war-torn African countries – but it doesn't. If it were concerned with the health and well-being of its citizens it would monitor and evaluate medical misadventure and the unacceptable level of preventable deaths in the NHS – but it doesn't. If it were truly concerned with citizen safety it would examine the bias and brutality of public and private policing – but it doesn't. The Home Office remains silent on all those topics that have the potential to reflect poorly on government. As a result, it is not an institution that

represents the British public – it is an organisation that exists to protect the reputation of government. In doing so, the Home Office employs psychology, economics and physics graduates in preference to criminology and sociology graduates to perform quantitative and statistical analyses to pressing Westminster concerns (Walters, 2006a, b). As a result, the Home Office, through its biased and skewed research agenda, presents the British public with an erroneous and partial view of crime in British society: that anti-social behaviour is a working class youth/drug problem; that violence has become part of black culture; that increased prisons are required to rescue a fledgling criminal justice system; that parental irresponsibility and a growing lack of ‘respect’ are the sources of injustice, inequality and criminal behaviour; and so on. In effect, the Home Office both perpetuates and superficially describes media stereotypes of crime and criminality that continue to be used by politicians for grandstanding and electioneering purposes. As a result, a reductionist perspective is proffered, that crime can be simplified to individuals who are both responsible for its consequences and for its eradication, thus washing the government’s hands of any culpability.

## Scottish Executive

It must be asked whether the views expressed above are unique to the Home Office or representative of other jurisdictions in the UK. The opportunity to compare the processes and practices of the Home Office with a devolved UK government emerged in 2003. While working at the University of Stirling, I had heard various accounts from scholars across different disciplines and different universities of how the Scottish Executive cherry-picked research findings, suppressed reports and censored critical commentary. Some of this has been reported in the press, including the Tata and Stephen’s work, which concluded that the Scottish Executive’s policy of fixed fees for lawyers had not delivered the promised £10 million reduction to Scotland’s legal aid bill, research that the executive suppressed for more than two years (Howie, 2007).

An opportunity to evaluate the pilot youth court funded by the Scottish Executive emerged in early 2003, and I became part of it. My subsequent encounters with the executive’s manipulation and suppression of ‘independent’ research have since received



widespread media attention (Peakin, 2006; Howie, 2006; BBC, 2006; Parry, 2007; MacPhee, 2007). I believe a further elaboration of events is useful here to identify the depth and reach of government control of and interference in academic research across the UK. What follows is an all too familiar tale of what happens when academics commissioned by government publish something critical out of an evaluation report or provide 'surprises' to government that are unanticipated and incongruent with government position. It is a story that had the then opposition spokesperson for education in Scotland, Fiona Hislop, petition the head of the civil service in Scotland, Sir John Elvidge, and call for a formal investigation into the conduct of the Scottish Executive (Peakin, 2006).

### **Case Study: Evaluation of the pilot youth court**

In 2003 a team of researchers at the University of Stirling, the University of Strathclyde and TNS Social were commissioned by the Scottish Executive to undertake an evaluation of the pilot youth court. The aims of the evaluation were: to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the youth court model; to determine the effectiveness of the youth court in relation to process, delivery, outcome and costs; to assess whether the youth court was effective and whether it met its objectives; and to explore the long-term viability of the youth court across Scotland.

The evaluation of the youth court (see McIvor et al., 2006; Popham et al., 2005) identified 'procedural success', notably the fast-tracking of young people into the court system, meeting timescales and the 'smooth operation' of the court. However, the lack of dedicated resources to address specific offender needs raised substantial judicial and social work concerns. There were also concerns that there was a greater use of detention and gaps in bail accommodation and mental health services for young people, and the links between mental health and social work services were found to be inadequate (Popham et al., 2005). That said, a media release from the office of the then Scottish justice minister, Cathy Jamieson, announced an extension of the youth court based on its 'success', stating:

*'Reducing youth crime is one of our biggest priorities and the Hamilton youth court pilot has contributed to meeting this challenge in an innovative and effective way ... This is an excellent example of how, by working together, we can rid Scotland of the blight of persistent offending.'*

**Jamieson, 2005: 1**

It is important to note that the minister was declaring the success of the Hamilton project and announcing its extension to a second location in Airdrie while the research team was still in the process of writing up the results of the first progress report! It remains a mystery how the minister could have deduced that the court was succeeding when the preliminary research findings had not been presented to her.

The evaluation was rolled out to examine the second pilot youth court in Airdrie and further concerns were identified, including the increased use of custody, young offender confusion over the process and judicial concerns that the court was breaching European human rights by allowing prior criminal history to be divulged to the bench prior to the young offender entering plea. The final evaluation report criticised the net-widening effect of the youth court and questioned whether a dedicated youth court was required given the success of the Scottish children's hearing system (McIvor et al., 2006). A draft of the final evaluation report was submitted to the Scottish Executive in October 2005. Following several months of the executive questioning content, a final report was submitted in April 2006. Yet it was not until November 2006 that the executive published the report on its website. Believing that our contractual obligations were fulfilled, and not content with the delays and the way the Scottish Executive was attempting to strong-arm the research team, I and a colleague decided to publish an academic article that captured some of the more critical aspects of the evaluation in *Youth Justice* (Piacentini and Walters, 2006). The article was picked up by *The Sunday Times Scotland* which published an article entitled 'Report slams unfair courts for juveniles' (Macaskill, 2006). Immediately following the newspaper piece, the Scottish Executive was claiming breach of contract and insisting that no future contact be made with the press (Dick,

2006). The project leader, Professor Gill Mclvor, explained that, in her opinion, the draft evaluation report had been in the public domain and that the researchers were of the view that publication of a separate academic piece was permissible. She also alerted to contractual ambiguities surrounding the project where the Scottish Executive had 'rolled together' two separate contracts into one, something she had not realised (Mclvor, 2006).

The head of the analytical services division at the Scottish Executive, James Sheffield, wrote to the evaluation team leader, Professor Gill Mclvor, stating that the Scottish Executive had served a notice of termination on the contract and were 'withholding the balance of £15,138' (Sheffield, 2006a). Five days later, James Sheffield wrote to Stirling University's principal and vice-chancellor to express his 'dismay on discovering that two members of the University of Stirling had breached [its] research contract OKD/6/37'. Sheffield's letter came complete with threats: 'I have no choice other than to authorize the termination of our contract and to ensure that these events are taken into account when assessing your technical ability to deliver a contract in the future' (Sheffield, 2006b). Moreover, Sheffield insisted on having a personal appointment with Stirling's vice-chancellor so that he could 'learn how the University intends to deal with the situation'. James Sheffield duly met with the senior management of the University of Stirling; the content of which remains a mystery. What is clearly known is that had the article in *Youth Justice* praised the success of the pilot youth court then I'm certain that the Scottish Executive would have welcomed it. Instead, the article identified concerns with the Scottish Executive project, concerns that were diluted in or vanished from the official evaluation report. Interestingly, sources internal to the Scottish Executive have identified that the 'rogue article' in *Youth Justice* was photocopied and sent to more than 100 sheriffs, public defenders and other criminal justice-related staff and was widely discussed. I doubt that such personnel would have been so actively mobilised around an official Scottish Executive evaluation. This says something about publicly rebuking official discourses that dilute and manipulate the truth for political ends. The ability to impact directly on senior individuals within criminal justice or other areas in British society can and must occur through the publication of critical scholarship.

Of further concern relating to the publication of my piece in *Youth Justice* was the reaction of Stirling University. Rather than upholding academic freedom and supporting its staff, Stirling University management proceeded to launch a disciplinary investigation against me and my co-author, an act of institutional cowardice, where the university caved in to government pressure in an attempt to placate the Scottish Executive. The details of the investigation, though amateurish and improper, are not pertinent here and were eventually dismissed with no case to answer. Thomson's Solicitors in Edinburgh, acting for the University and College Union (UCU), argued that Stirling University's action in bringing a disciplinary investigation against scholars for exercising their academic freedom was arguably illegal and that, in their view, there was no breach of contract between the Scottish Executive and Stirling University. The actions of Stirling University reveal the precarious and fragile financial nature of some academic institutions, where all efforts must be taken to ensure that future funding sources are not jeopardised, and they also emphasise the power of the Scottish Executive to influence the internal workings of a university. From Stirling's point of view, it could be argued that it was wiser to offer the heads of two staff members than upset the Executive by defending academic freedom.

As mentioned, the issue received national headlines in Scotland, including a live television broadcast on Newsnight Scotland where the actions of the Scottish Executive's 'airbrushing' of independent academic scholarship were widely condemned. Of course, what I have described is a familiar tale of the state control of criminological research and the risks of speaking out which have been documented elsewhere (Cohen and Taylor, 1977; Jupp, 1989; Brusten, 1981; Punch, 1985; Hughes, 1996; Ferrell and Hamm, 1998; Presdee and Walters, 1998).

When academics commissioned by government fail to produce the results which reinforce existing government policy and practice, the authorities will cherry-pick and highlight the most positive aspects of the research. Should the researcher publish alternative accounts to the favourable ones acclaimed

by government, the academic can expect various techniques of neutralisation that will attempt to discredit and rebuke their work and reputation.

I finish this case study with an email that reveals the mythical rhetoric of civil servants wanting to 'work with academics', such as that of Chloe Chitty described above. During the events surrounding the Scottish Executive, I communicated my views to colleagues in my former department and received a reply from a senior civil servant seconded to Stirling University's Dementia Centre. The reply of Professor Andrews aptly encapsulates the ways academics are viewed by the Scottish Executive and the 'relationship' that exists between civil servants and critical scholars in the academy. She replied by email:

*'I am seconded to the University of Stirling from the Scottish Executive and as a senior civil servant I'll make sure that your view about the SE is communicated directly to them ... The formulation of government policy is a complex process, involving the views and wishes of a lot of people who sometimes think that academics are a waste of time and space. In the light of that, it is not always a good idea to broadcast your disdain of them because, in my view at least, we should try to change their minds, not insult them.'*

**Andrews, 2006**

A salient point worth remembering (or perhaps forgetting) is that outspoken academic commentary is to be discouraged, that academics are often viewed by civil servants as a 'waste of time and space', and that critical scholarship is seen as 'insulting'. Yet, like field mice scurrying around a python, to appease university obsession with income generation and with the misguided belief that they will change or influence policy, academic criminologists continue to line the corridors of the Home Office and the Scottish Executive with cap in hand hoping to receive a slice of the government's growing financial pie for criminal justice research. That is insulting.

## **Boycott and resistance**

For years I have listened to civil servants (and academics) declaring the importance of an academic/government research and policy

alliance. The power imbalance that exists between civil servants and the providers of knowledge (academics, consultants, members of the public) severs all possibility of an egalitarian relationship where mutual interest and expertise can be expressed in government policy. The rhetoric of bringing the academic world closer to the workings of government policy will always encounter applause, yet, at present, it is unachievable and undesirable. As things stand, they must remain separate. To participate in Home Office and Scottish Executive research is to endorse a biased agenda that omits topics of national and global concern in favour of regulating the poor and the powerless. If all academics boycotted Home Office and Scottish Executive research and refused to provide such research with the credibility that academic credentials bring, then senior criminal justice civil servants would be forced either to change the existing agenda or to engage solely corporate researchers. If the latter were adopted, not only would Westminster and the devolved parliaments begin to question the lack of 'expertise' informing policy but the emperor would be without clothes.

In my view, academics must resist government-contracted research and private consultancies. Academics are not paid from the taxpayers' purse to profit personally by granting legitimacy to corporations driven by profit and shareholder interests. Nor should academics participate in government research agendas that ignore, for example, crimes committed by the most powerful and wealthy in society, while endorsing policies that aim to regulate the already over-regulated in society. Moreover, the Home Office will abort research that 'is no longer of interest to ministers or policy colleagues, either because the research has been so delayed that the results are no longer of any interest or because ministers or officials have changed their priorities' (see Walters, 2003: 57). Academics may spend months or even years planning and implementing research that is funded by the Home Office, only to have the plug pulled because a minister has changed his or her mind. Academics should never operate under such conditions, and until the Home Office develops a research agenda that seriously addresses crimes of the powerful and permits independent scholarship to occur without interference and to

be published verbatim, then, I say, academics must boycott the seeking of, and participation in, Home Office and Scottish Executive research, research tenders or commissioned research, as well as all research for private security firms where the *modus operandi* is commercial profit rather than addressing issues of social injustice and exclusion.

My call for a boycott here and elsewhere on Home Office and Scottish Executive research and private corporate consultancies will undoubtedly be perceived as a position of disengagement or isolationism. Nothing could be further from the truth. I mean to promote engagement through diverse narratives that are often regulated, curtailed or prevented by the constraints of government and corporate contracts. Scraton (2001) argues that what is needed is the expansion of 'knowledges of resistance'. Such knowledges, he argues, cannot be generated under contract where they are often silenced or neutralised. They require criminologists to stand outside the domains of commercial criminology and actively assert a position of resistance.

The development of theoretically grounded critical scholarship cannot occur through the production of technical reports for governments or consultancy advice to private companies. 'Critical' criminological scholarship is now often viewed as anachronistic or, alternatively, as a catch-all term for all forms of research that raise questions or challenge assumptions. All criminologists can, therefore, legitimately lay claim to a critical status. This is clearly problematic as critique becomes softened or watered down. A vast amount of funding for criminological research is directed to administrative projects that aim to improve existing apparatuses of crime control. This research serves the priorities of contemporary governing technologies.

There is much to be gained through establishing networks of collective concern (with academics, professional bodies, parliamentary committees, political parties, campaign and voluntary groups) that advocate for the promotion of multiple narratives, social justice and for the dissemination of new and critical knowledges. The promotion of new critical narratives

in patriarchy and power, human rights, transnational justice, as well as state and corporate crime, provide important voices of resistance against an emergence of embedded criminology. If criminology is to survive or is to make any sense it must embrace diverse knowledges of resistance; in my view, criminology must be a knowledge of resistance. This calls for a politics of engagement that is often prohibited by the proscriptive and regulated culture of government research, which many academics are seduced by in the name of income generation or evidence-based decision-making. Rather than having young scholars employed en masse by projects funded by the Home Office and the Scottish Executive that are highly regulated to provide government with information that supports its political priorities, I would prefer to see established criminologists employing research fellows on grant funding or universities providing careers for young scholars to pursue research of their own interest. In doing so, they will provide important contributions to theoretical and critical knowledge.

Such knowledges represent the hallmarks of the discipline and, as such, we should constantly celebrate the critical voice. To take the British context, why is it that the names of Pat Carlen, Stan Cohen, Joe Sim, Stuart Hall, Barbara Hudson, Phil Scruton, Ian Taylor and Jock Young remain among the most influential criminological scholars of the last 40 years and not those who spend their careers writing technical reports for government? The merit and value of the critical scholar stands the test of time. It is not defined by the vagaries of contemporary politics and the machinations of Whitehall. Instead, it is based on a thoughtful, reflective and innovative scholarship.

## Conclusion

Academic criminologists commissioned by the Home Office or the Scottish Executive to conduct evaluations of government policy are often in the position to unearth the relationship between politics and policy, which is why authorities often seek to control the production, distribution and consumption of emerging new knowledges about their world of policy-making and practice. When researchers reveal critical insights into these processes through their evaluative work, those in power may seek to control



the distribution and consumption of these new knowledges and question the production process itself (Presdee and Walters, 1999).

In my view, civil servants in the Home Office and the Scottish Executive do not want to 'learn' from academics – in their minds, there is little that academics can teach them. They seek credible reassurance and endorsement for political priorities and not genuine debate, challenge or disagreement, and certainly not anything spoken or written that will embarrass a minister and/or denounce the actions of government. We live in a society where government manipulates or cherry-picks criminological knowledge and produces distorted pictures of the 'crime problem'. The offspring of this flawed process are policies of deceit which fail to target the most deleterious and socially injurious criminal aspects of British society. The Catch 22 facing government administrators is that they must produce credible 'scientific' endorsement for their own failed and misguided policies, hence the process of suppression, control and manipulation outlined above. Academic criminologists must not grant legitimacy to such a corrupt process. I suggest that what is needed is an increase and a vocal outpouring of the critical voice or what I call 'deviant knowledge' (that which is critical of contemporary forms of governance and challenges the existing social order). I am strongly opposed to academics (notably to senior academics) engaging in contract research or consultancy advice with the Home Office or the Scottish Executive that simply grants legitimacy to the ongoing criminalisation and marginalisation of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society.

In an environment where income generation dominates the academia agenda, where government bodies are purchasing university courses to meet their needs, where corporations are funding academic projects and personnel to maximise their profits, and where public servants determine and regulate more and more the type and nature of academic scholarship, it is time to be buccaneers and to resist existing trends. Sure, there are risks in adopting a position of resistance, but the alternative is a form of intellectual collusion that is akin to corruption.

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# A firing squad to shoot the messenger: Home Office peer review of research<sup>1</sup>

Tim Hope

In the world of crime and justice, one of the few repositories of expert knowledge outside government and the criminal justice system is academic criminology. As a scientific and scholarly activity, criminology is likely to be a source of knowledge – in the current political circumstances what we must now call ‘evidence’ – that comprises a source both of scepticism and other possibilities. Evidently, there is public expectation at work here too: at the same time as crime, insecurity and disorder have risen higher on the political agenda, so there has also been unprecedented growth in criminology as an academic activity (Morgan, 2000).

As a subject in its own right, or in conjunction with cognate disciplines, criminology has proven popular with the public at all levels of academic study. Similarly, as an activity of scholarship,

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this paper were delivered as a public lecture to the Howard League for Penal Reform in Scotland, at the University of Edinburgh, 11 April 2007. An earlier version of this paper was also submitted as written evidence to the Government Chief Scientific Adviser’s Review of Science in the Home Office (Government Office for Science, 2007). Further development of some of its arguments is in Hope (forthcoming).

teaching and research within the higher education system, criminology benefits from its share of the public votes for education, training and science; and it is scrutinised and held to account for its work accordingly. So, in as much as parliament invests in and maintains higher education and scientific research, criminology in universities can make a reasonable claim for eligibility as a contributor to the 'public good', at least as that is expressed through the democratic processes which govern public investment in science and education.

Despite this, in his Sir John Barry Memorial Lecture delivered to the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, the then director of research, development and statistics at the Home Office, Professor Paul Wiles CB, answers his question 'Can criminologists engage in policy making?' by opining, 'British criminology seems to have lost the knack of engaging in public debate' (Wiles, 2002: 247). Among the reasons given is a lack of supposedly policy-relevant research skills and interests. For Professor Wiles, criminology fails as a public good. By this he means that it is irrelevant, in its aims or its methods, either as an effective external critic that can guide policy in constructive directions or as the provider of useful knowledge that might address the requirements for evidence that are enumerated in the remainder of the lecture. For Professor Wiles – and by the same token for the government – to have any point, criminology has to be a public activity; '... and, if it has to be so, then it better try and serve the public good' (ibid, 251). Aside from its somewhat threatening tone, a noteworthy trope of the lecture is that, commensurate with its growth, academic criminology has become a private vice rather than a public virtue, especially since 'a larger criminological community can indulge itself by writing for each other' (ibid, 248).

### **Why academic scholars 'write for each other'**

It is true that academic scholars and scientists do indeed 'write for each other', but for a specific reason: that the outcome of this activity – known generically as peer review publication – results in publicly accessible knowledge. Although, once published, such knowledge becomes part of the corpus of

criminology, by publication it can no longer be the exclusive property of academic criminologists. Regardless of the views of any of its readers (including governments) as to whether published criminology contributes to whatever they might see as the 'public good', it is still accessible in principle as a public good, in the technical sense of the term. Even though it may sometimes need translation into terms and language that lay people, including politicians, can comprehend, and it is but one form of knowledge that might be relevant for policy, it remains accessible in principle to policy-makers. Indeed, to facilitate access to this corpus is surely one of the main responsibilities of the specialist officials maintained by the Home Office under Professor Wiles' command.<sup>2</sup>

The principle of peer review publication lies at the heart of scientific activity, not least the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Far from an indulgence, the RAE is the chief public policy mechanism for ensuring the quality of research within the UK university sector, and specifically for rewarding and developing excellence. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (STC, 2004) has endorsed a number of reasons for why peer review is so important for safeguarding the integrity of published knowledge: it is an efficient guide to the volume of published research; it is a mark of distinction (thereby providing academics with incentives to strive for excellence – a principle adopted by RAE); and, very important, it gives the lay reader 'an indication of the extent to which they can trust each article' (ibid, paragraph 205). The peer review process is also arguably the best (or least bad) means of achieving scientific progress, paradoxically because it capitalises on the natural competitiveness of academics within a democracy of ideas. Since 'scientific controversies typically take place within a company of equals (however much the status of the parties might otherwise differ) and moreover ... take place in public, subject to the observation

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<sup>2</sup> At least it was during the period 1974 to 1991 in which I served as a research officer at the Home Office (see also Croft, 2005).

of peers', no orthodoxy of ideas, methods or approaches can predominate (Merton, 1967: 54).

Through collective self-policing via open, democratic peer review, the academic community strives to limit individual self-aggrandisement and prevents any of its members from dominating discourse with their personal or partisan views. Through equal competition, innovation in research and thought can flourish, and the stultifying fear of offending the powerful can be alleviated. Ideally, all these conditions lead to the growth of knowledge. Yet, like democracy itself, peer review is a principle that relies upon particular institutional arrangements to make it work, especially those 'checks and balances' that guard against corruption or abuse – for instance, multiple 'blind' reviews, absence of vested interest, editorial oversight, disqualification of conflicts of interest, rights to appeal and reply, etc. Again, like democracy, none of these arrangements is perfect and they ultimately rely upon the integrity, competence and mutual respect of members of the scientific communities involved (see STC, 2004, paragraphs 206-207), qualities that universities have traditionally fostered, even if such an ethos has become beleaguered in modern times. Above all, the peer review process is a public one – if it is actually seen to fail, the publication process in which it occurs also fails, first its constituency of contributors, and then its status as publicly guaranteed knowledge, failing the public good most of all.

### **The Home Office peer review process**

Certainly, the quality assurance value of peer review publication is not lost on government. As the Home Office chief scientific adviser, Professor Wiles, told the STC:

*'[W]e have external and independent peer review and on the basis of that peer review I then take the decision as to whether [Home Office commissioned research] should be published. If I decide, as a result of peer review, it is not good enough [sic] to be published, if it is external research the authors are then free to seek publication if they can.'*

**STC 2006: Ev. 62, Q1120**



However, despite this, the Home Office has not published its particular mechanisms and procedures for this peer review process (Home Office, 2005: 25) and we are left in the dark as to how, in practice, the integrity of the procedures are maintained. We are simply led to believe (as Professor Wiles would appear to want to let us) that the procedure will produce research of a quality on a par with that published in other scientific journals that do maintain a peer review process. Unfortunately, though, this appears not to be the case. The actual practice of the Home Office would seem fundamentally to contradict the principle of peer review outlined here. Far from ensuring the integrity of its publications, or of the research that it has commissioned, the practice of the Home Office seems to be the manipulation of a secretive process with certain select 'peers' as its accomplices.

Between 1999 and 2002, I led a consortium of university-based researchers under contract to the Home Office to evaluate the impact of local crime prevention projects comprising the Reducing Burglary Initiative, Phase 1 (RBI). The RBI was a flagship component of the government's £250 million Crime Reduction Programme (CRP): 'the most ambitious and innovative programme for tackling crime so far attempted in the western developed world' (Homel et al., 2004: 1). The CRP was intended to find long-term, sustained reductions in crime through implementing 'what works', promoting innovation into mainstream practice, generating significant improvement in the crime reduction knowledge base, and delivering real savings through crime reduction and improved delivery (ibid). As the Home Secretary told parliament in July 1998, the CRP was also unprecedented in being inspired by criminological research evidence (Goldblatt and Lewis, 1998). H.M. Treasury had also committed the CRP to a large-scale programme of independent, external social scientific evaluation (Homel et al., 2004). This was candidly a welcome investment in academic criminology, particularly at a time when British universities were coming under pressure from the funding councils to increase their research grant income potential (Morgan, 2000). Certainly, in seeking to fulfil the brief we had been given for the research, we were in receipt of a considerable volume of public

money (around £1.2 million).<sup>3</sup> Rightly, much useful knowledge was expected of us in return. Yet, although substantial data, information and knowledge flowed to the Home Office as a consequence of our efforts, the results in terms of Home Office publication have been meagre (but see Hope et al., 2004). This is not a reflection of our effort but due rather to manipulations of the publication process. The resulting state of affairs has denied us the opportunity to account properly for ourselves – that is, in public and through the official channels in which our research was conducted.

## The politics of criminological research

A convenient and revealing means of recounting this process is provided by reference to Home Office email correspondence of 9 to 15 August 2006. The subject matter, entitled 'RE: Politics of Criminological Research', appears to have been prompted by a voluntary request to Home Office officials for comment on a 'draft chapter' submitted by its authors, whom we shall call X and Y.<sup>4</sup> Apparently provoked by an allegation that the Home Office had suppressed or tampered with the publication of research emanating from the CRP, officials replied:

*'It is not true to say that there were long delays because reports had "been demoted into the 'methodologically weak' category"' as many were, indeed, on any standard, methodologically weak and a great deal of effort had to be expended to **bring them up to scratch**. I do*

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<sup>3</sup>Despite costing the project according to the invitation to tender, and it having gone through the Home Office procurement process, some commentators saw the tendering process for the CRP as somewhat compromised from the outset, viz.: '...there has been a substantial exodus of researchers from [the Home Office]. And many of these ex- [Home Office] personnel are now amongst the largest recipients of ... contracts' (Morgan, 2000: 79). For my part (see footnote 2), such allegations make my account of what follows all the more galling.

<sup>4</sup>A copy of this exchange has been released to me in response to a 'subject access request' under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Information regarding the identity of other individuals was 'redacted'.

*not think that the chapter pays sufficient recognition to the effort that went into publishing these reports. In doing that work, arguably **beyond the call of duty**, we were adding to the value produced and preserving knowledge, as many **other organisations** when faced with such a Herculean task would indeed have consigned the lot to the bonfire. RDS did nothing of the sort.'*

**10 August 2006, 6.10pm (emphases added)**

It is worth remembering that these remarks are made by civil servants of a ministry of state. On the one hand, officials seem aware of their duty to public interest (adding value, preserving knowledge) but, on the other hand, in comparing themselves with 'other organisations', they seem to believe that they are entitled to treat and dispose of research they have commissioned (with public money) much as they might imagine a private company would. Yet even the executives of private firms have to account to their shareholders. Instead, the officials of the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) appear insouciant of the alarming state of affairs revealed in these comments: if true, they suggest a worrying waste of public money – the commissioning of poor quality contractors, the inadequate specification of research tenders, etc.; if false, they constitute a calumny against the community of CRP research contractors. Still, the hubris of these remarks is astounding: after all, even Hercules did not expect to be rewarded for cleansing his *own* stables!

Aside from our general reporting of findings on the process, impact and cost-effectiveness of the projects subject to our research, we were also commissioned specifically by the Home Office to produce three additional 'thematic reports' with a view to publication (Hope et al., 2002; Crawley et al., 2002a; Crawley et al., 2002b). A peer review commissioned by the Home Office of Hope et al. (2002) (a report devoted to explaining our research methodology) said:

*'I must say I found it very difficult to find any criticisms of this report – though I did try! It was extremely interesting to read – an excellent and thorough discussion of the miasma of problems researchers face in evaluating multi-level intervention programmes. It gave first-rate advice ... which should be of great worth to others evaluating the BRI and similar programmes ... their sophisticated statistical*

*approaches demonstrated beautifully the strength of impact of the interventions and how long into the project this took to emerge.'*

Nevertheless, the report was subsequently declined by the Home Office for publication, citing an absence of interest to policy or practitioners (other than fellow programme evaluators) and a general cut in the 'budget' available for publication; though we were permitted to seek publication elsewhere. Although the other reports (Crawley et al., 2002a; Crawley et al., 2002b) were reviewed for stand-alone publication under our authorship, instead of proceeding to publication, the Home Office subsequently decided to incorporate summaries into its own publications. Yet nothing further has ever materialised; and the ensuing silence from the Home Office regarding these reports leaves them in limbo, since we have never been formally released from our contractual obligation to give the Home Office first option to publish. The response to these commissions had left us demoralised, with little strength to tackle the Sisyphean labour of rolling our reports back up the Home Office 'clearance' mountain. Strictly speaking, then, officials were correct in saying to X and Y:

*'It is unfair to accuse us of suppressing research, as our task – quite a mammoth one – was to find a way of making sense of more than 80 separate reports ... and to make their findings available in an accessible way.'*

**10 August 2006, 6.10pm**

I am not aware of anyone outside government who knows exactly how many evaluators' reports have ever emerged as publications, though if this figure of 80 or more submissions is true, a tally of the Home Office publications list would suggest that many have not been published officially. And it may be news that there were at least 80 of them. If their authors' experience has been anything like our own, the fate of these publications has been due less to overt suppression than a reluctance to anger the 'official mammoth', which continues to squat upon the pile of reports it specifically procured (unless by now they have indeed been consigned to the bonfire). Not surprisingly, this calls into question the selection of those findings that have been deemed publishable, though without access

to the totality of submissions, it remains impossible for any one else to evaluate whether those not published were simply 'not good enough' (as Professor Wiles might have it) or whether their non-appearance reflects some other ulterior purpose.

In July 2003, the Home Office published 'Findings 204' (Kodz and Pease, 2003), which purported to provide 'early findings on burglary reduction' based on some 'simple ways of combining data'. The report was based upon the burglary data collected by the three research consortia that were evaluating the RBI-Phase 1, including our own, and had been given external peer review. The publication of this report was accompanied by a Home Office press release headed 'Groundbreaking projects crack burglary', which reported a speech by Home Office minister Hazel Blears claiming a 'tremendous impact on burglary rates' (Home Office, 2003). I had been sent a draft copy of 'Findings 204' prior to publication to which I responded, expressing considerable methodological misgivings and concluding, 'I would rather you did not publish these Findings in this form ... failing that, please note that ... if asked publicly, I shall feel compelled to disassociate myself from it (letter, 16 May 2003)'. Whether by coincidence or not, 'Findings 204' was published while the British Society of Criminology was holding its annual conference at the University of Wales, Bangor; and I did disassociate myself when it was presented by Home Office officials at a panel which we shared.

I published my misgivings in a peer reviewed journal (Hope, 2004) having first voiced them to my professional peers (ibid, 303). This paper replicated the method of 'Findings 204' on data from our own consortium's research, and compared its conclusions, case by case, with those based upon our own methods. The bases of each method were also discussed and the results compared (ibid, Table 1). Prior to publication, a draft of Hope (2004) was sent to the Home Office for comment, which did not demur from publication.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Indeed, officials made a helpful suggestion about the presentation of data in Table 1 of Hope (2004).

Finally, following a protracted review process, a report of our research was published as Hope et al. (2004). Apparently, our submission was reviewed extensively by three external reviewers. We were presented merely with excerpts from their reviews as part of a set of general comments the Home Office wished us to incorporate into our report. We did not see their reviews in their entirety, including their advice to the Home Office editors (as is often customary with journal publication). Nevertheless, at the end of the day, no significant revisions were asked for, nor were there successful challenges to the methods we had outlined in our earlier methodological report (Hope et al., 2002). Trustingly, we had left the selection of a title for our online report to the Home Office, although the one the officials chose for us – *Strategic Development Projects in the Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and East Regions* – unlike the titles given to the reports of the other two consortia involved with RBI-Phase 1, seems quite a good way of ‘burying bad news’, at least from the gaze of internet search engines.

## **Criminal Justice Matters**

Some while later, I was invited to contribute to an edition of *Criminal Justice Matters* concerned with the relationship between research and policy. Here, I recounted again the differences between ourselves and the Home Office in the calculation and presentation of findings, while also voicing some concerns about the way in which the Home Office assessed crime trends for performance purposes (Hope, 2006a). The article attracted media attention, leading to an invitation to submit it as part of the written evidence of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into scientific advice to government (STC, 2006, Ev. 145), to which I also gave oral evidence on 24 May 2006 (STC, 2006, Ev. 38).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The publication of the committee’s report (STC, 2006), as did that of Hope (2006), occasioned critical media comment, viz.: ‘MPs accuse ministers of twisting science for political purposes: evidence distorted to give fig leaf of respectability.’ The Guardian, Wednesday, 8 November 2006.

In the Home Office email correspondence with X and Y, occurring three months later, officials said, with reference to 'Findings 204':

*'... it was important that the results from the three RBI consortia were brought together and Ken [sic] undertook an analysis using a standard shift-share analysis, **which is the norm for evaluations of this kind**. The findings were subject to our usual peer review processes. I have to say that I find it astounding that the authors [i.e. X and Y] casually describe work by a person of ... eminence as the "Home Office mounting a re-analysis which managed to turn failure into success:"*

**9 August 2006, 3.12pm (emphasis added)**

With regard to our own research methodology, the officials said:

*'This is a **non-standard method**, and one which differed from the solution adopted by the other two consortia [involved in evaluating the RBI-Phase 1] ... We also had other external advice that suggested Tim's [sic] time-series method was weaker ... Tim may not like that conclusion ... Coupled with the independent advice we received from a range of sources, I do not think it is fair to repeat Tim's accusations as if they have credibility.'*

**10 August 2006, 6.10pm (emphasis added)**

While it is immaterial whether or not I might like that conclusion (voiced among those who clearly feel they are my familiars), it is true nevertheless that until I had sight of this correspondence I was unaware of the existence of this particular piece of external advice. Nor in the course of drafting Hope et al. (2004) were we appraised of it. Nor, needless to say, were we offered an opportunity for scientific rebuttal. Nor, if this is its view, has the Home Office sought publicly to counter the credibility of my evidence to the House of Commons, either at the time when the STC would have been able to take evidence, or in the government's response to the committee's report (STC, 2007). Presumably, then, confident in the eminence of its own appointed experts, the Home Office remains privately dismissive not only of our own, apparently more humble, scientific acumen, but also of the credulity of the House of Commons.

Nevertheless, Home Office confidence in the statistical acumen of its own peers and officials might be misplaced. It was as surprising to see time-series analysis regarded as a non-standard method of programme evaluation (see McCain and McCleary, 1979) as it was to see 'shift-share analysis' described as the standard.<sup>7</sup> Nor is there any reference whatsoever to this method in either The Green Book (H.M. Treasury) or The Magenta Book (GSRU), the standard, official handbooks of policy appraisal methods intended to guide government research. Even so, the analysis actually presented in Findings 204, replicated in Hope (2004) and repeated in the Home Office commentary (Kodz et al., 2004) that accompanied Hope et al. (2004), does not constitute a 'shift-share analysis', at least by the definition used by another of the consortia (see Millie and Hough, 2004). Rather, the method (in Kodz et al., 2004, Table 1) resembles a 'change-score analysis', an approach that is considered to be 'notoriously unreliable' (Judd and Kenny, 1981: 123-124). Evidently, though, it must have been thought sufficiently reliable to be used again (applied to our consortium's data) in the published Home Office report on the overall cost-effectiveness of the RBI-Phase 1 projects (Bowles and Pradiptyo, 2004).

I sought to raise some of the problems of inference for public policy associated with such simplistic and unreliable methods of assessing change in my article in 'Criminal Justice Matters' (Hope, 2006a) and, if only as a matter of 'academic interest', remain open to discussion of the methodology of programme evaluation. Nevertheless, whoever X and Y may be, and regardless of whether or not they might count themselves as my academic peers, they clearly intended to pay little attention to my *published* criticism in their own publication, rather choosing to discount it in favour of the private Home Office officials' view. Thus:

*'... [X] and I have discussed your e-mail, which [X] passed on to me. We certainly don't want to be unfair to you and I've made some*

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<sup>7</sup>It does not appear in the indices of two standard references in the evaluation literature: Cook and Campbell (1979) or Judd and Kenny (1981).



*(tracked) changes to the passages on the CRP...and on the "Tim Hope saga"... this version can be used instead of the previous one.'*

**From Y. 15 August 2006, 11:17 BST**

In corroborating their publication with the more powerful party to this controversy, the courtesy my peers X and Y wish to extend to the Home Office has not been extended to us. Book chapter publication, of course, represents only a partial engagement with peer review, which seems to have been exploited in this case. In book production, the pre-publication review process remains a private matter. In this case it would seem that the primary reason for X and Y seeking to 'clear' their draft chapter may be less to do with checking facts than, presumably, with constructing a 'spin' that would suit the Home Office. In so doing, X and Y handed the Home Office an opportunity for a private 'right of reply' to our work that it was unable or unwilling to voice publicly. In book publication, as with most review processes, trust is placed in the editor to ensure integrity and 'fair play'; but while in journal publication the editor presides over a review process that is at least accessible to the other independent reviewers, pre-publication review of book chapters remains a private matter between editor and contributor. Likewise, with edited books, post-publication review is also difficult. While, in principle, published books are open to review in academic journals (offering those affected an opportunity to reply), it would be unfair to the editor, and to the other contributors to what might otherwise be a valuable book, to focus criticism on one egregious aspect, nor would what seems like the continuation of grudges do much service to a book's prospective readers. Yet, in exploiting these difficulties, the Home Office has been able to settle its own grudge with us with the complicity of my erstwhile peers and the avoidance of public scrutiny.

## **Silencing of criticism**

The techniques used by Home Office officials seem an almost perfect example of those discussed by Thomas Matthiesen (2004): while overt repression of opposition is unacceptable in a democracy, there are nevertheless ways in which government can set about the 'silent silencing' of criticism. In our case, this comprised not only the attempt to silence our own voice, but also to amplify the voices of compliant peers so as to drown out our

criticism. Regrettably, the particular process described here would seem to have elicited the support of willing peers in the subversion of academic safeguards (i.e. peer review publication).

There are a number of steps in the process of creating a compliant regime that will ensure the promotion of acceptable research and the silencing of critical findings: first, as with Professor Wiles' lecture (Wiles, 2002), government abrogates to itself the right to select what knowledge is deemed to be useful, essentially by defining overtly instrumental knowledge as the public interest, and thence equating the public interest with its own. It can then undermine the legitimacy of academic research – i.e. as self-indulgence – while surreptitiously also undermining the legitimacy of academic quality assurance institutions (i.e. peer review publication).

Second, government issues a temptation. For some, the founding of their own exclusive 'discipline', dedicated to the service of government (and the garnering of large research grants), may be tempting. Yet puppet regimes always lack legitimacy because they are founded on false premises, and thus dwindle in their usefulness once their assets have been plundered (Hope, 2006b). For others, there are more immediate temptations. As Rod Morgan (2000) put it with regard to the Home Office procurement process that appeared to govern the selection of evaluators for the CRP:

*'There is no independent review, unless one judges the researchers employed within the [Home Office] always to be the appropriate peer reviewers, a proposition which stretches credulity ... Moreover – and I count myself among these ranks – if one is well-known to senior [Home Office] personnel one may be invited to act as a research consultant overseeing the delivery of a contract by a fellow academic, or assessing the quality of competitive bids from the major criminal justice services for initiative development money, and then being invited to bid for the evaluation of those same policy initiatives. This smacks of insider trading and is at odds with the appearance of transparent*

*fairness ... there is a need for some ethical protocols to be developed here.'*

**Morgan, 2000: 79<sup>8</sup>**

Quite. Yet, be that as it may, if seats are being reserved on the gravy train there may always be a temptation to jump aboard.

Third, the coup de grace: compliance is secured by the threat of expulsion from the privileges bestowed by power. Rather, then, be a traitor to your peers than risk expulsion to the outer darkness of academia, far away from prestige, influence and juicy research grants. From then on, as every prince knows, you can be put to good use.

In as much as I have argued that 'academic criminology' via the medium of peer reviewed publication is itself, in principle, a public good, the idea that there should be a distinct 'public criminology' is oxymoronic. While, in principle, the institutions of academic peer review publication are a 'constitutional' safeguard for the integrity of science, nevertheless it seems that they can be circumvented if you set about creating your own version of a public criminology. It helps to persuade the public if you can get the natural authority of elected government on your side; and it is clearly an advantage to have compliant scientists to hand if you are seeking greater legitimacy in your claims of 'evidence-based' policy. But that makes you less rather than more legitimate: not only are you subverting the constitution of science, but since you are also claiming a (spurious) scientific legitimacy, you are subverting public trust in government as well. Still, if your own science fails, you can always shoot the messenger, and find some willing accomplices to attach the silencer to your weapon.

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<sup>8</sup>For my part, I can attest that I had performed no such services prior to securing the evaluation contract mentioned here. While I might like to think this was secured on merit (or even perhaps value for money), this is a taint that lingers nevertheless. Perhaps, it has been expunged by subsequent events? Even so, guilt-by-association remains as long as this insinuation remains; which is another illustration of the point I am seeking to make.

While it may always have been the case that governments are deaf to conflicting or critical voices – and that politics is always to the fore in the ‘governmental project’ of criminology (Morgan, 2000) – having staked one’s reputation on ‘evidence’ as a legitimating political device, there is an overriding political need, it seems, to ‘fix’ the evidence in your favour. And that may mean also fixing the circumstances in which the evidence is produced and validated.

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